Reflection Paper on Project Management in Library and Information Science

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We face the need for project management in our everyday lives; every time we need to produce or develop something new (e.g., services, products, results), solve an existing problem, or create a new value (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015). Though we intuitively use one or more project management approaches, we often fail. A highly trained project manager will help most, if not all, initiated projects to succeed. In this paper, I share my personal philosophy and statement on project management in Library and Information Science.

Personal Philosophy: Library and Information Science Project Management

Spending most of my life research and research administration within academia, I often had to face multiple completing deadlines, which led me to realize early on that I needed to prioritize and structure my work. Project management courses taken over a span of a decade have helped me tremendously in my work and even in my personal life, especially in my home renovation projects. Though during my work I wrote multiple business and grant proposals, I have found that project management is a constantly changing field. One can learn basic project management skills and apply them successfully; however, one needs to participate in professional development activities and continue practicing in order to become a great project manager. Therefore, my first personal philosophical approach is to be a life-long learner, and to constantly work on bringing my knowledge to the next, more advanced level. Life-long learning helps us to understand how the world changes and is essential in both professional and personal development. This Master of Management in Library and Information Science will be my third graduate degree; I also have an extensive list of additional courses taken as a part of continuous professional development. My plan is to continue mastering my project management skills, learn existing and newly emerging tools, and apply them in the library and information field. My second philosophical approach is to double check my own work as even a minor error may have a huge impact on the project results.

My third philosophical approach is my dedication to the project, team, and the organization. Projects always have end dates and are therefore temporary in nature. Once I agree to take a project on, I devote myself to it-to ensure it is successful. My fourth philosophical approach is to continue learning about myself, to learn how I perceive the world and how others perceive me in this world. My fifth philosophical approach is to never stop working on improving yourself, express leadership behaviors, and be a great team member.

I see project management in Library and Information Science (LIS) as the ability to apply general project management skills and methods, complete all objectives identified in the project management plan, and modify them as needed to meet the requirements of an individual LIS project. Some examples of LIS projects include library renovations, library space redesigns, implementation of new library cataloging systems, creation of institutional repositories, metadata projects, to name just a few.

A project manager is a person who oversees a project, is accountable to all stakeholders (people affected by the project results) and possesses a set of skills needed to successfully lead a team (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015). The project manager is the one who develops and presents a business case that includes a project charter and justifies the need for the project's existence, outlines the resources needed (human and financial), and seeks the approval of the project. LIS project managers stay with the project throughout all project lifecycle phases including initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, controlling, and closing phases. The project manager ensures these phases are aligned with project management processes consisting of securing the project approval, development of the project charter and plan, meeting deliverables, and finalizing project closure documents (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015).

Project Initiation

As a LIS project manager, I will start a project with the initiation phase. I will complete an environmental scan that includes a literature review and review of what other organizations have done in similar situations. I will study what other LIS project managers have done to complete similar projects and any lessons learned from their previous experiences and my own. The initiation phase will also include the development of a project charter and identification of stakeholder groups. This will be the time to meet with stakeholders and use various tools (e.g., team brainstorming, individual surveys, interviews, and focus groups) to collect as much data as possible about the current state and future needs in the area of interest (e.g., services, products), and to complete a gap analysis (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 57). I will properly document all findings and share them with representatives from each stakeholder group for future discussions and revisions. I will use Google Doc, SharePoint (or other similar tools preferred by LIS organizations) to ensure all changes are trackable, authored, and date stamped. My project charter (or simple project plan) will include objectives, scope, approximate cost, length of the project, major stakeholders and sponsors, and milestones; I will present it to the sponsor(s) for their review and approval.

I will incorporate the SWOT approach. SWOT analysis will help to identify opportunities, threats, weaknesses, and strengths (Cervone, 2008). In addition to the SWOT analysis, there is a need to get a buy-in from various organizational stakeholders (p. 19). For example, the Library of the University of Saskatchewan in Canada (n.d. -a) identified the problem of that the majority of academic literature (e.g., peer-reviewed articles) were moving online and found no further need for multiple (seven) branches to store printed journals (compared to several years ago when the majority of materials were in print). In addition, the Library saw an opportunity, as there was a growing demand for collaborative and studying space on campus (n.d. -a). The Library completed extensive consultations with various institutional stakeholders, identified preliminary costs, resources, duration, and developed and presented a business case. The Library also identified major strengths such as moving physical collections to a storage facility that was easily accessible on demand, renovating physical space, applying open space approach, and creating quiet study rooms and large collaborative spaces that were equipped with white boards, teleconference equipment, white screens, and projectors. Presenting opportunities included the possibility for increased collaboration and higher research output. The Library also heard that opening a Starbucks coffee shop in the center of this space might help promote collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. Some weaknesses were the extra time needed to bring physical materials back from the storage. The threat of not proceeding with the project meant the library would lose patrons and not be useful to the campus community. The only alternative was to maintain a status quo, which was quickly ruled out.

The University of Saskatchewan also confirmed feasibility of the project by ensuring there were sufficient technical, operational, economical, scheduling, and cultural support measures in place; the university also confirmed there was an urgent need for the project (Cervone, 2008, p. 20). Given the university is a publicly funded educational institution with two major streams of revenues coming from the provincial government and student tuition (M. Just, personal communication, June 5, 2020), plan-driven (or traditional, waterfall) rather than agile was the preferred project management approach (Lots, 2013; Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015).

Project Planning

My planning phase will include answering questions about the project, how to complete it, and when we can tell that we have reached the end of it. Creating a project plan and detailed scope statements will be part of this phase. As a LIS project manager, I will include a detailed project plan with a scope, work breakdown structure (WBS), schedule, timeline, budget, and evaluation. I will treat a scope statement like a contract agreement; it will clearly identify what is promised to be completed by the end date of the project and what exactly is and is not included (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015). As a project manager, I will include a list of risk assumptions (e.g., faculty will cooperate, a physical space for storage of printed materials will be found, etc.) and constraints (e.g., library will be closed for renovations, need a temporary space to continue offering library services during renovations, etc.) (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015). Detailed scope will include alternative options/routes. Going back to my example about the redesign of the University of Saskatchewan Library, the Library had a great communication plan to ensure the campus community was aware of the why, what, when, and how of this project (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. –b).

Once I identify deliverables, these will become work packages; WBS (work breakdown structure) will help to divide the project into deliverables, as it is easier to estimate the cost when the project is broken down into small work segments (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 65). I will use the WBS dictionary as a collection of descriptors and details about each individual WBS package that is a part of the project management bundle. I will identify and describe activities in the project scheduling (p. 65). As a LIS project manager, I will carefully examine sequencing of activities; some work activities may require prerequisite activities to be completed first (p. 66). Once I build a proper order of work activities, I will be able to identify the time needed for each individual activity (and for the overall project) (p. 68). When completing a project scheduling, it is helpful to identify the critical path or the order of work activities that will take the longest time and are not time flexible (has zero slack) (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 72). I will use Microsoft Project or Gantt charts as these tools are useful in projecting the work packages onto the time scale (p. 73). Gantt charts are also helpful in displaying the costs of each activity; in an academic library project, I see the combination of all three methods (parametric, analogous, and bottom-up) that may be used (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 83). As a LIS project manager, I will remind myself about the importance of remembering to add up individual activity costs, add indirect costs (e.g., utilities, equipment, facilities) (p. 83), check the budget for accuracy (Hamilton, 2004, p. 12.2), and to also add contingency funding (p. 12.4).

I would like to go back to my University of Saskatchewan Library example. Once the planning stage was complete, *The University Library Transformation Project Branch Libraries Master Plan* (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. – c) was made public to the campus community. This 187-pages document outlines the plan to create "spaces" including "simulations suites, experiential learning spaces, research commons, digitization suites, teaching spaces, spaces for students to de-stress and decompress," as well as "individual, group, and community study and work spaces" (n.d. –c). Key concepts of this plan are "knowledge creation," "mobility + social media," "library vibrancy," "effective study process," and "focus on "We" not "Me" (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. –c).

Project Execution

I will begin the execution phase with an official announcement of the project launch (it may be good to have a celebration for a better team bonding) and updates on the project. For this, I will have developed a solid internal and external communication plan and will use electronic (e.g., email and Zoom) and print (e.g., flyers, posters, and newspapers) to deliver my messages.

Project Monitoring and Controlling

I will manage project scope by closely monitoring to ensure each project deliverable is on time, within the allocated budget, and is of a good quality. If there are sufficient financial resources and there is the need to expedite the project execution, I may consider implementing a crashing approach by adding extra human resources to the project (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015). My monitoring of the work on the project will include regularly checking the scope, schedule, quality, risk, and human resources.

I will also carefully control schedule, budget, and risk by requiring that change requests are made in writing and are for any revisions to the schedule, timeline, and/or resources (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 96). For this, I will develop the project change request form that will need to be completed by those requesting the change (Harrin, 2019, para 16). Any requests for changes need to be controlled (Hamilton, 2004, p. 12.9). Scope, cost, and time constrain one another and if one of these things changes, there is usually a need to change the remaining two variables (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015). For example, to complete a part of the project sooner, a project manager would need to allocate more financial and/or human resources to this part of the project. As a project manager, I will review and approve requests for changes (I may need to seek the approval from the sponsor(s) of the project, especially when extra funding is needed to implement the changes) (Harrin, 2019, para 4). I will then be sure to revise the Gantt Chart to introduce the approved changes (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 104).

As a project manager, I will implement both the quality assurance and quality control; I will do this by implementing a proactive approach and ensuring all equipment is functioning, people are trained, and the work progresses according to the plan) (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 96).

Project Closure

Closing the project includes signing-off and issuing final payments. It is also good to review the project experiences and document any lessons (to consider these in future project endeavors) (Wells & Kloppenborg, 2015, p. 106).

What Makes a Great Project Manager and a Great Team Member

Project management calls for a complex set of abilities including technical (knowledge of a specific discipline), business (understanding how a business operates and functions), and strategic (awareness of the entire industry's priorities) competencies.

Great team members resist their natural human desire to preserve energy and invest their time and energy for the good of the team and organization. They are passionate about the work they do, proud about the contribution they make, are self-motivated, and well-disciplined (Lencioni, 2005, p. 4). They are well aware of the five main team dysfunctions and work hard to prevent these dysfunctions from occurring (p. 6). They work on personal biases and weaknesses to: 1) build trust among team members; 2) learn how to handle conflicts; 3) clarify their role and fully commit to a project; 4) be on time and accountable for their tasks; and 5) not lose a sight of the final goals (Lencioni, 2005).

Leadership versus Management, and the Impact of Each on Project Management

Project leadership and management skills while both required for success in project management are not the same set of talents (Hernon & Rossiter, 2006). It is possible for one individual to possess both leadership and management skills; yet in larger organizations, it may be beneficial to split these roles. Project management requires skills to carry out projects in the present, while project leadership requires having a vision to lead organizations to the future.

Leaders demonstrate behaviors that influence others to follow them (Hernon & Rossiter, 2006, p. 260).

A systematic review (Boden et al., 2018) of 80 library leaders who work in health sciences field identified the following important factors in library leadership: learning, experience, interpersonal skills, teamwork project management and communication skills, and “leadership and value of a good leader” (p. 288).

Project leadership requires a unique set of skills to lead and direct a team on the path to achieving organizational goals. Great leaders exhibit emotional intelligence traits; they are aware of themselves, have great self-control, are empathic and self-motivated, and have great social competencies (Goleman, 2010, p. 3). A great leader understands the team’s dynamic and realizes there is a greater potential if s(he) is able to lead the team quickly and efficient through forming, storming, norming, all the way to the performing stage, to achieve the highest level of efficiency (Tuckman, 1965, p. 3). A great leader is also vulnerable yet a strong individual; it takes courage, compassion, and connection to open yourself to possible threats (Brown, 2018). On a positive side, vulnerability lays a foundation for trustworthy relationships (Brown, 2018). A great leader is a great communicator and possesses excellent interpersonal skills, prefers consensus decision-making approach to ensure everyone has the opportunity to voice their concerns and, after extensive discussions, are comfortable moving ahead with the project (Ford, 2012). A great leader does not need to be in the senior position to become a leader. When I was looking to interview a librarian as a library leader, I was surprised to find out that many librarians whom I connected with did not think of themselves as leaders.

When I think about a great leader, I recall Dr. Melissa Just, Dean of Library at the University of Saskatchewan (n.d. –e), who is currently the Interim Provost and Vice-President

Academic until the end of January 2021. It was my privilege to secure an interview with a member of Trojan family Dr. Just, which I conducted on June 5, 2020. After this interview and her talk as a part of the Conversations with Leaders on September 23, 2020, it became clear to me that Dr. Just has expressed leadership behaviors throughout her entire twenty-five years career as a librarian and a leader. As Dean of the Library at the University of Saskatchewan, Just oversees 130 faculty and staff, six branches, the Education and Music Library, the Engineering Library, the Law Library, the Leslie & Irene Dube Health Sciences Library, and the Science Library, as well as the University Archives & Special Collections, and the Student Learning Services. Dr. Just possesses qualities both of a great leader and of a project manager; she was the one leading on *The University Library Transformation Project Branch Libraries Master Plan* (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. – c).

Self-Assessment and Self-improvement Plan

My plan is to continuously improve and advance my project management, interpersonal, and leadership skills with a goal to become a great project manager and a great team member.

I believe I have a great set of transferable skills that I can successfully apply in project management and leadership. As a leader, I will continue mastering the De Bono’s Six Thinking Hats Method described by Singh & Jankovitz (2018) and will aim to lead by example, think outside of the box, and “manage for creativity” (Amabile & Khaire, 2008, p. 1).

Great leaders, managers, and team members work to learn about themselves and this is what I am planning to do-continue learning how I perceive the world and how others see me. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test (Lencioni, 2005, p. 29), my personality fits an introverted INTJ (Introverted, Intuitive, Thinking, and Judging) profile. This means I need to network more, to overcome my introverted personality. With the help of the SDI

(Strength Deployment Inventory) test (Core Strengths, n.d.), I have learned that I have a HUB (displaying all three colors equally) personality, which shifts towards the Green personality under stress. This means that during stressful situations, I need to remember that “thinking” (Green SDI) may be misunderstood by those with Blue personalities, who “draw off feelings more than on more objective decision-making approaches” (Barrett, 2013, p. 319). I need not to micromanage but encourage those with Blue personalities, to create a positive atmosphere and achieve higher productivity and performance by my team.

I will also ensure to create and regularly update my personal improvement plan. In addition, my plan includes attending conferences (e.g., American Library Association, Canadian Association for Research Libraries, Society for Research Administrators International, etc.) to benefit from various sessions on leadership, project management, and teamwork.

In conclusion, my personal philosophical approaches in project management are: 1) being a life-long learner; 2) always double check my own work; 3) remain dedicated to the project; 4) continue learning about myself; and 5) never stop working on improving myself, express leadership behaviors, and be a great team member. Keeping in mind and following these philosophical approaches will also help me to become a great leader, great project manager, and team member. These will also help me to advance my career as a Library and Information Science professional.

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